

# DPH Encourages Residents to Prepare for Dangerously High Temperatures, Take Steps to Prevent Heat Illness as Temperatures Soar

With temperatures expected to reach the mid-to-high 90s and heat index values ranging from 100 to 105 degrees later this week, the Division of Public Health (DPH) encourages Delaware residents to prepare for extreme heat and take steps to prevent heat illness as temperatures rise. The National Weather Service has issued an Excessive Heat Warning for New Castle County and an Excessive Heat Advisory for Kent and Sussex counties between 11:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., Thursday, July 13.



Our bodies have less chance to recover during hot days and warm nights, placing everyone at risk for heat-related illness. When temperatures and humidity are high, sweat ceases to evaporate and the body's natural cooling system slows down or shuts down completely. Hot weather can cause heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and severe respiratory conditions, which can be fatal.

Extreme heat is especially dangerous for seniors, young children, people with disabilities, and people with breathing conditions and other chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other respiratory problems. A 2012 study showed significant risk to those with heart disease. Higher temperatures, not even in the

extreme, were associated with higher levels of inflammation in patients with preexisting heart health conditions. The study found that elevated temperature can trigger heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems in people being treated for heart disease.

Also at risk are people without access to air conditioning, fans, or cooling shelters.

**Make a Heat Safety Plan:** DPH suggests that every household make a heat wave plan in case of a power outage. Air conditioners should be serviced and electric fans should be obtained before the heat rises to dangerous levels. Cases of bottled water should be kept on hand and residents should listen to local news reports for the locations of community “cooling centers,” which are often public libraries or churches. During days of extreme heat, Delawareans should check on vulnerable members of their families and neighbors. For those who may need additional assistance, Delaware 2-1-1 connects Delawareans with critical services and support. Eligible callers can receive referrals to summer cooling and crisis assistance, the City of Wilmington’s Free Electric Fan Program for seniors, and nearby cooling centers.

### **Tips to prevent heat illness:**

- Do not leave anyone alone in a parked car, even for a minute. Call 911 if you see a child or someone unable to open a door or window left unattended in a vehicle. Keep your car locked when you’re not in it so children don’t get in on their own. When traveling with a young child in your car, create reminders to check your backseat, by putting something next to your child such as a briefcase, a purse or a cell phone that is needed at your final destination. This is especially important if you’re not following your normal routine.

Also remember that any equipment left in a car can quickly become hot to the touch, especially metal pieces in child car seats, seatbelt handles, and wheelchairs. Check the

temperature of these items prior to use to avoid potential burns.

- Carry water with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks containing sugar, alcohol, or caffeine, which dehydrate the body. Check with a doctor before increasing fluid intake if you have epilepsy, heart, kidney, or liver disease, or if you are on a fluid-restrictive diet. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.

Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/nutrition/index.html> for more information.

- Stay indoors on the lowest floor possible. When outdoors, wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Wear a hat or use an umbrella. Use sunscreen with SPF 15+. Sunburn slows the skin's ability to cool itself, and has been linked to skin cancer.

- Avoid extreme temperature changes. Be careful trying to cool down too quickly; a cold shower immediately after coming in from hot temperatures can lead to hypothermia, particularly for the elderly and children. In these cases, cool water is better than ice cold water.

- Limit outdoor activity, especially mid-day when the sun is hottest. Work out or hold team practices early in the morning or in the early evening. A CDC online course for coaches, athletic trainers, students, school nurses, parents, and teachers is at [cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extreme/Heat\\_Illness/index.html](http://cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extreme/Heat_Illness/index.html).

Heed the following heat danger warning signs and take suggested actions:

- Heat cramps occur in the muscles of the limbs or abdomen during or after physical activity in high heat. Sweating results in a loss of fluids and salts that cause muscle cramps. Address heat cramps by resting in a cool place and drinking plenty of water.

- Heat exhaustion is more severe, occurring when a person is overheated, along with reduced or unbalanced intake of fluids. Symptoms include dehydration, fatigue, weakness, clammy skin, headache, nausea and/or vomiting, rapid breathing, irritability, and fainting. Take these simple steps to reduce heat exhaustion: Move the person indoors or into shade. Loosen or remove the person's clothing. Encourage the person with heat exhaustion to eat and drink. Get the person to a cool shower or bath. Call your doctor for further advice.

- Heat stroke occurs when the body can no longer cool itself, and can be a life-threatening event. Prompt medical treatment is required. Symptoms include: flushed, hot and dry skin with no sweating; high body temperature (above 103 degrees F, taken orally); severe, throbbing headache; weakness, dizziness, or confusion; sluggishness or fatigue; decreased responsiveness; and loss of consciousness. If heat stroke occurs, take these steps: Call 9-1-1 immediately. This is a medical emergency. Get the heat stroke victim indoors or into shade. Get the person into a cool shower or bath or wipe them down with continuously soaked cool washcloths while awaiting emergency responders.

For more information, visit the CDC at [cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html](https://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html).

**Make a Heat Plan for Pets:** DPH also urges pet owners to make a plan for caring for their pets. Animals at the greatest risk of stress from the heat include pregnant or lactating animals, very young and older animals, animals with darker coats, obese pets, short-nosed dog breeds, and animals with chronic health conditions. Signs of heat stress can include panting, increased salivation, restlessness, muscle spasms, increased heartbeat and body temperature, weakness, lack of coordination, bright red or pale and sticky gums, vomiting, diarrhea, and depression.

- **Pets should not be left in vehicles, even in mild**

**temperatures:** Animals kept inside a vehicle in warm or hot temperatures are susceptible to heatstroke. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the interior of a vehicle can reach 89 degrees in just 10 minutes when the temperature outside is just 70 degrees. At 80 degrees outside, a vehicle's interior can reach 99 degrees in that time. Temperatures will continue to rise inside a vehicle, and the AVMA states that cracking windows does little to help. Call 911 immediately if you see a pet left unattended in a vehicle.

- **Animals should have access to shade and water when outside:** The best place for pets in hot temperatures is inside the home. If a pet must be outside in the heat, make sure the animal has a shady area and fresh water to help stay cool. The interiors of cat and dog houses can get very hot in summer months and, therefore, do not provide adequate shade.

- **Practice caution when walking dogs in the heat:** The best time of day to walk dogs in summer months is in the early morning or late evening when the sun's heat is not as intense. A simple touch of the hand to any surface where a walk is planned will tell if it's too hot for a dog. If it's too hot for a human hand, it's too hot for a dog's paws.

- **Pay attention to signs of heat stroke:** Just like humans, dogs are susceptible to heat stroke in high temperatures, especially if there is increased activity or little ventilation. A dog that is drooling and panting due to heat can quickly progress to a heat stroke, which can be life-threatening. Immediate veterinary attention is suggested for dogs that have become over-heated.

*A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing*

person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit [delawarerelay.com](http://delawarerelay.com).

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, drink almost no sugary beverages.